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Rowland et al.

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(54) **BELT ADJUSTMENT SYSTEM**

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(22) Filed: **Aug. 15, 2011**

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Related U.S. Application Data

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A41F 9/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **2/312**; 2/311

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC ..... 24/163 K, 178, 265 BC; 2/322, 325, 316, 2/321
See application file for complete search history.

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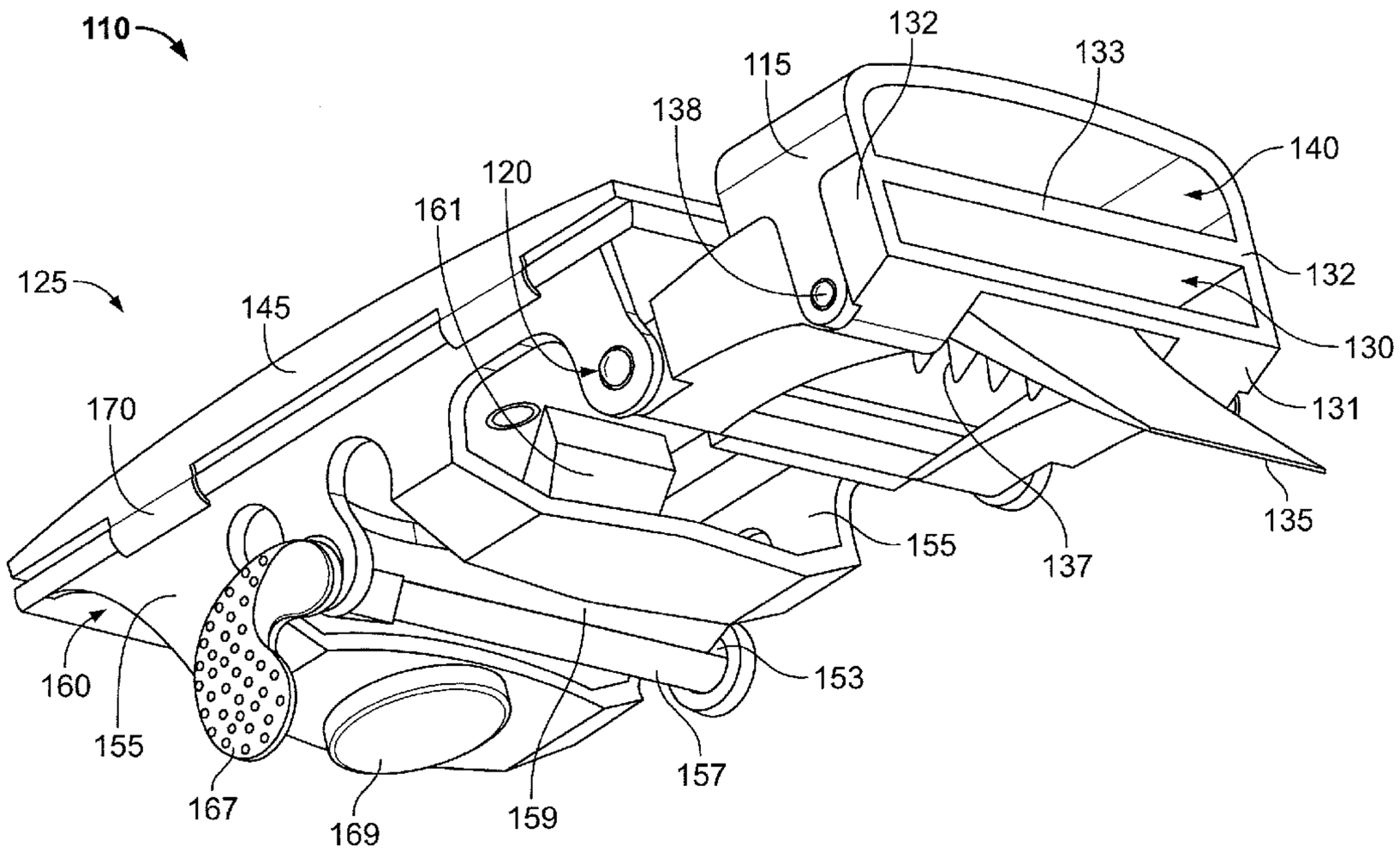
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Disclosed are belt adjustment systems, particularly for wearing around a user's waist, that permit a continuum of belt loop sizes or a larger selection of belt loop sizes. The belt adjustment system includes an elongate belt member having a first end, a second end and a series of teeth positioned on an inner surface near the second end and a fixation member having first and second adjustment elements.

10 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



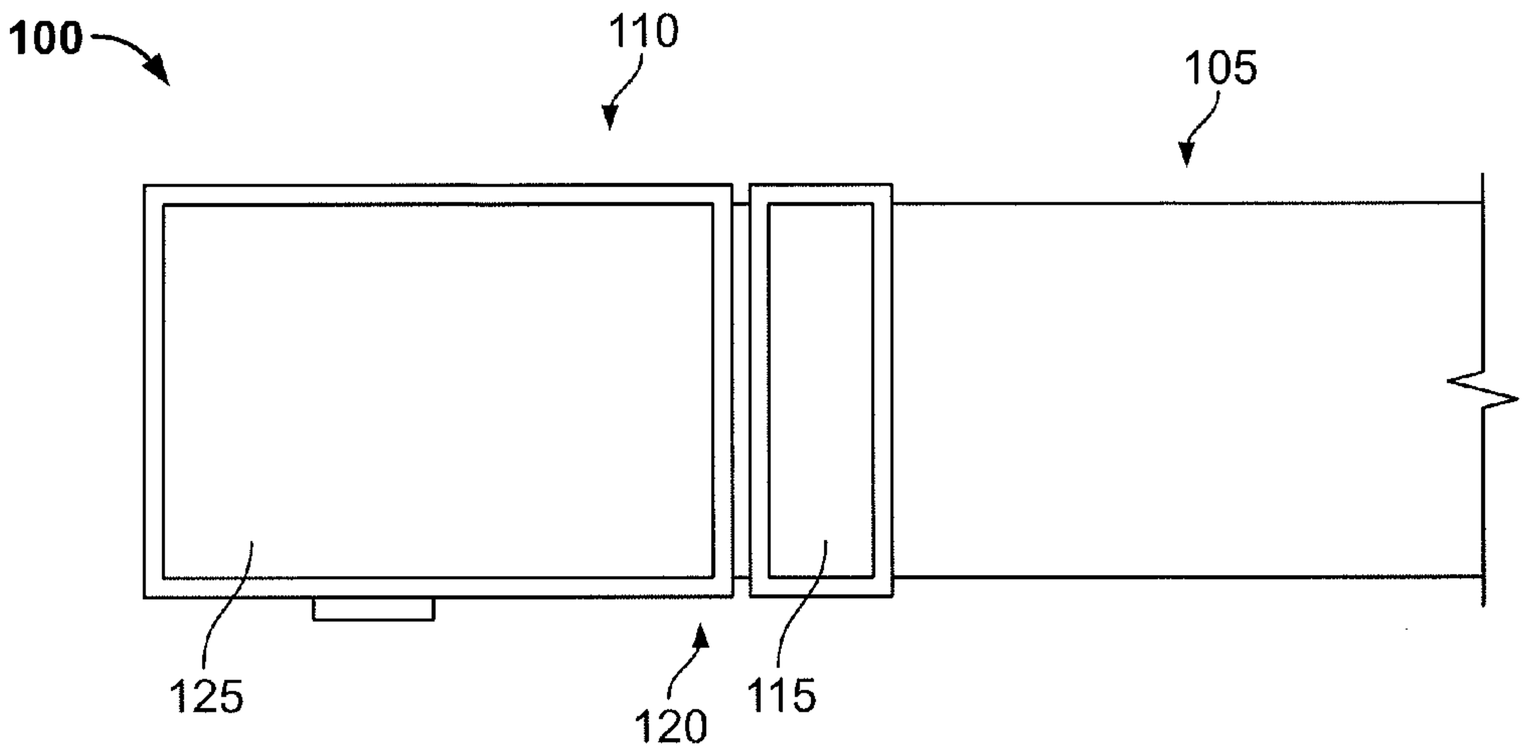


FIG. 1

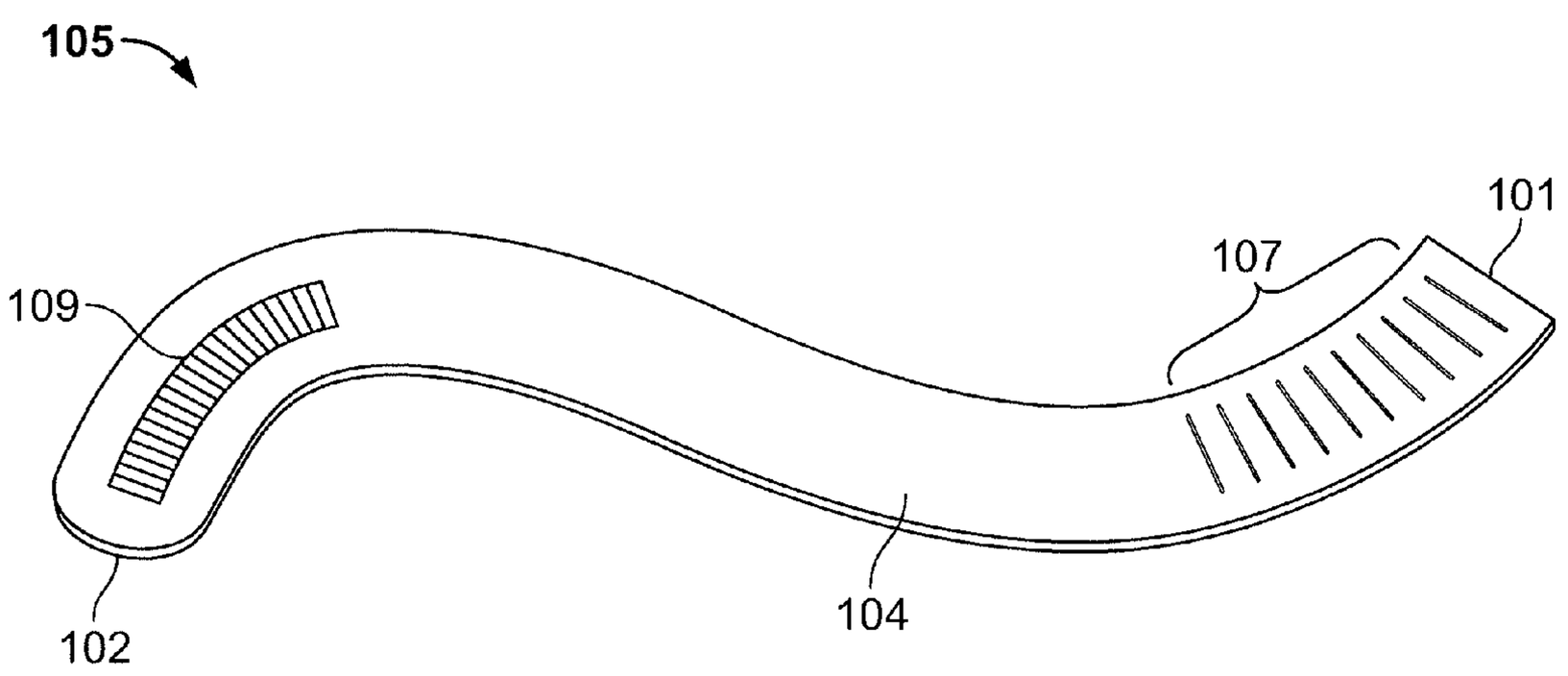


FIG. 2

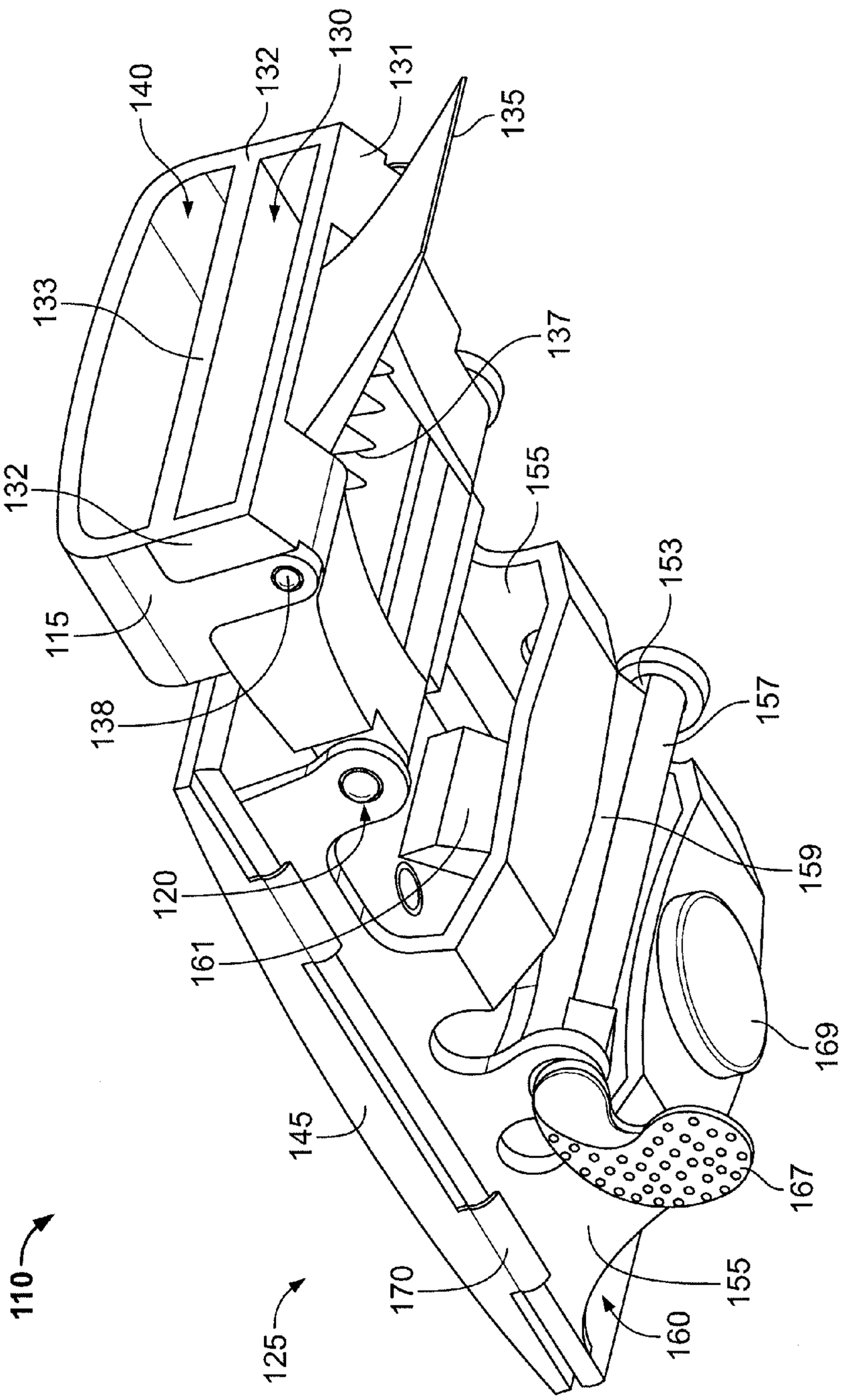

140
132
130
131
135
133
137
132
155
115
153
138
157
120
159
161
169
145
167
170
155
160
125
110

FIG. 3

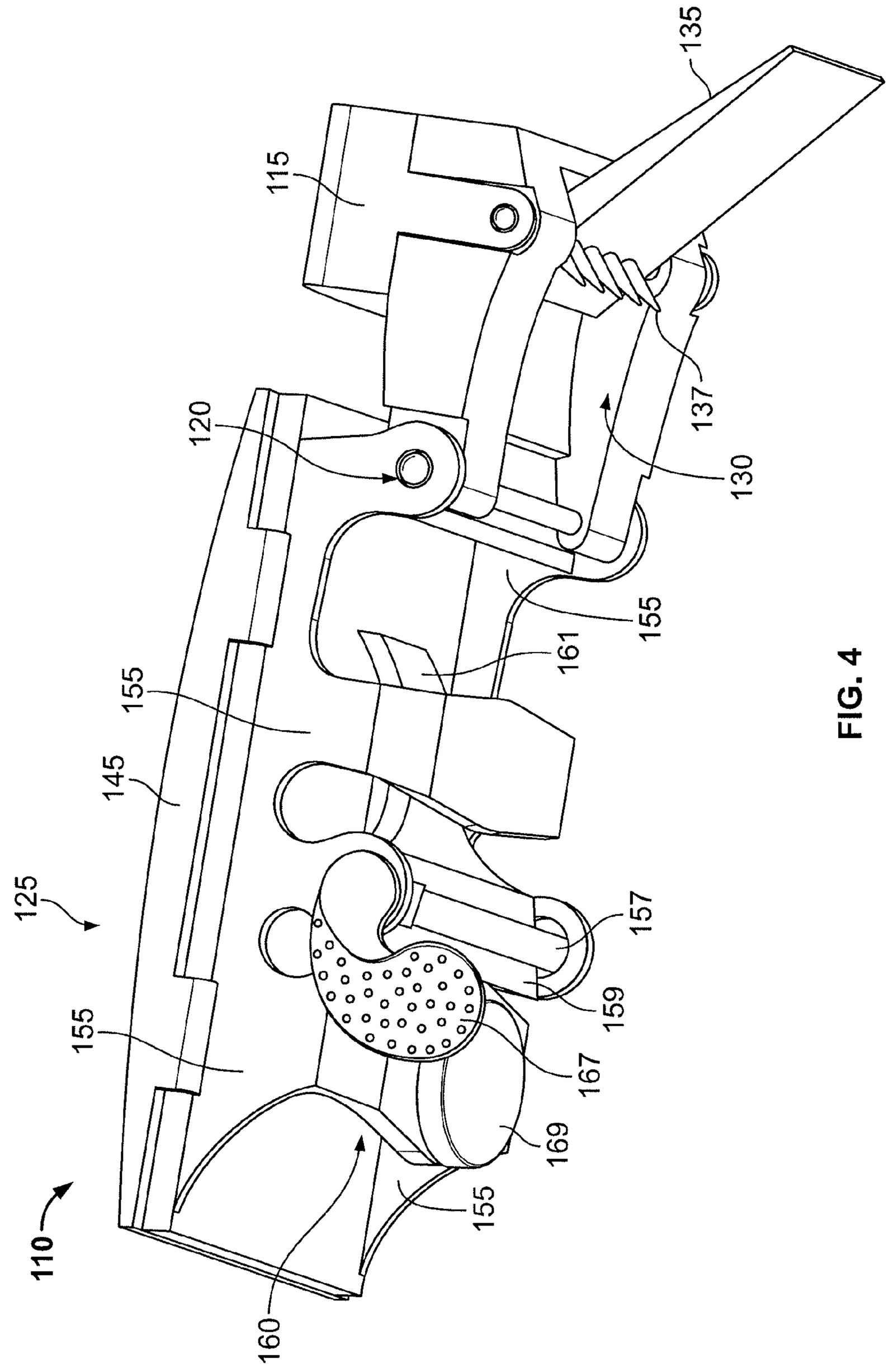

135
115
120
137
130
155
161
155
145
125
155
157
159
167
169
155
110
160

FIG. 4

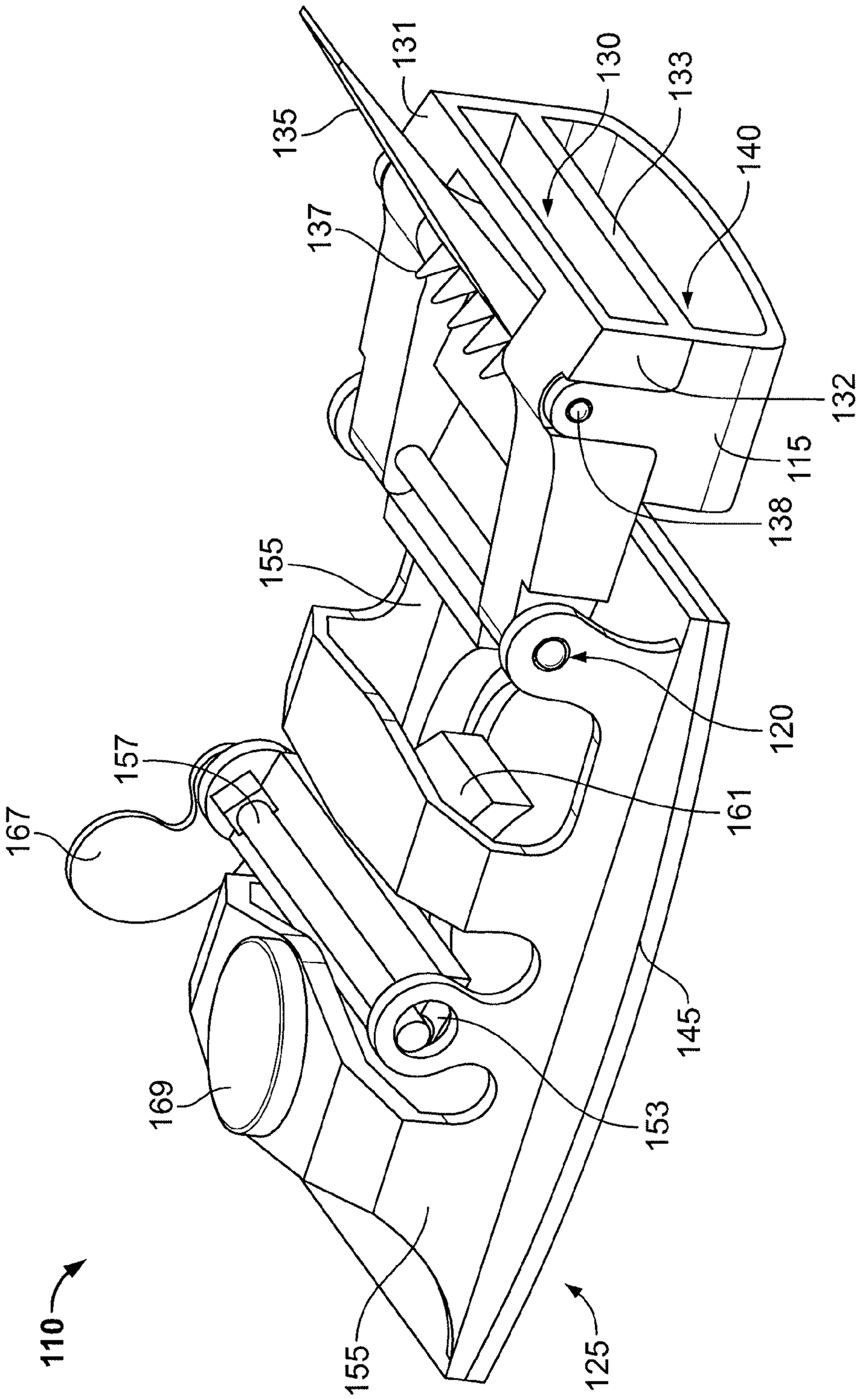

131
130
133
135
140
137
132
115
138
155
120
157
161
167
145
153
169
155
110
125

FIG. 5

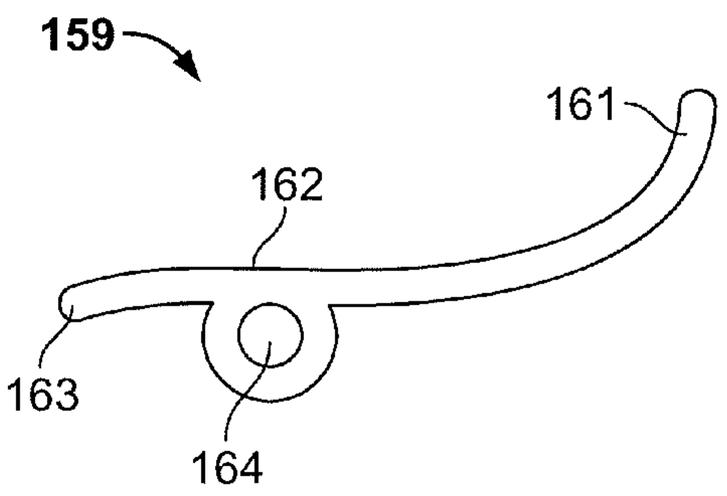


FIG. 6A

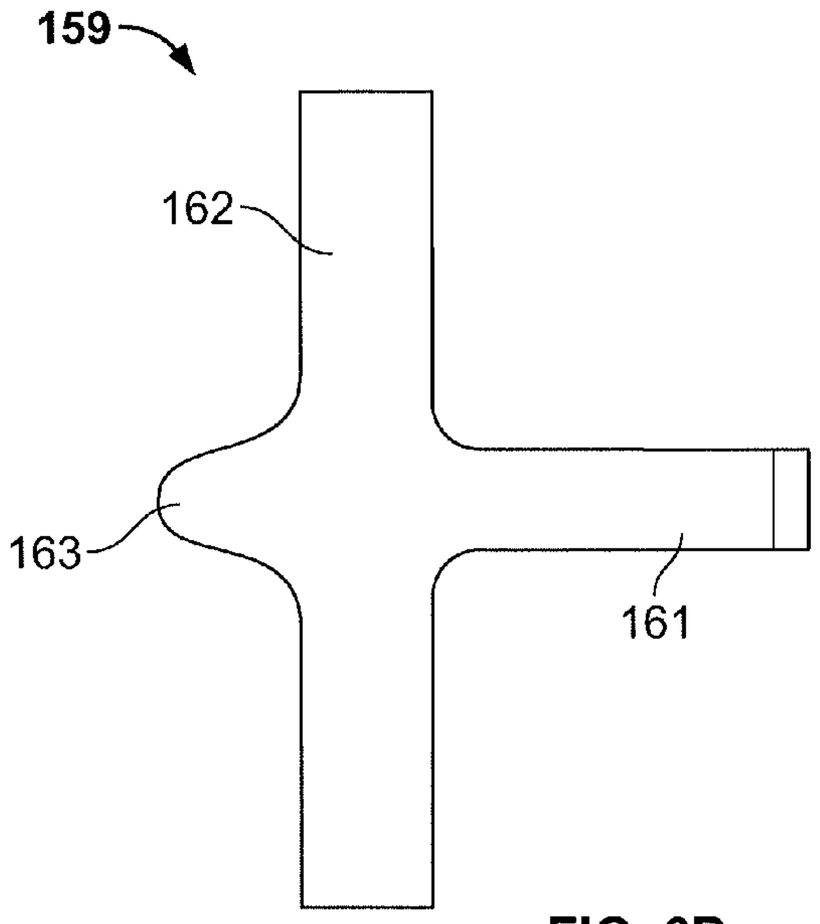


FIG. 6B

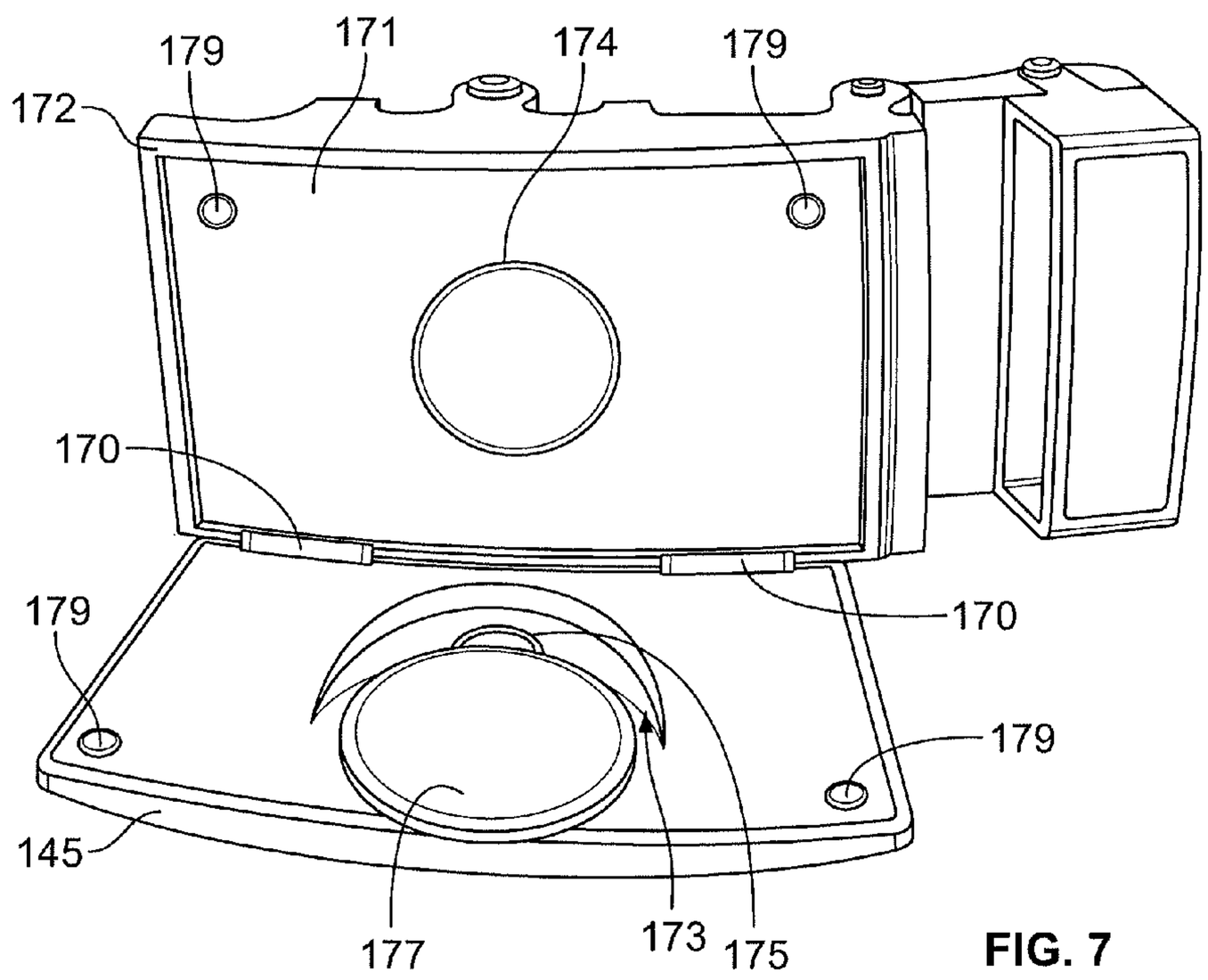


FIG. 7

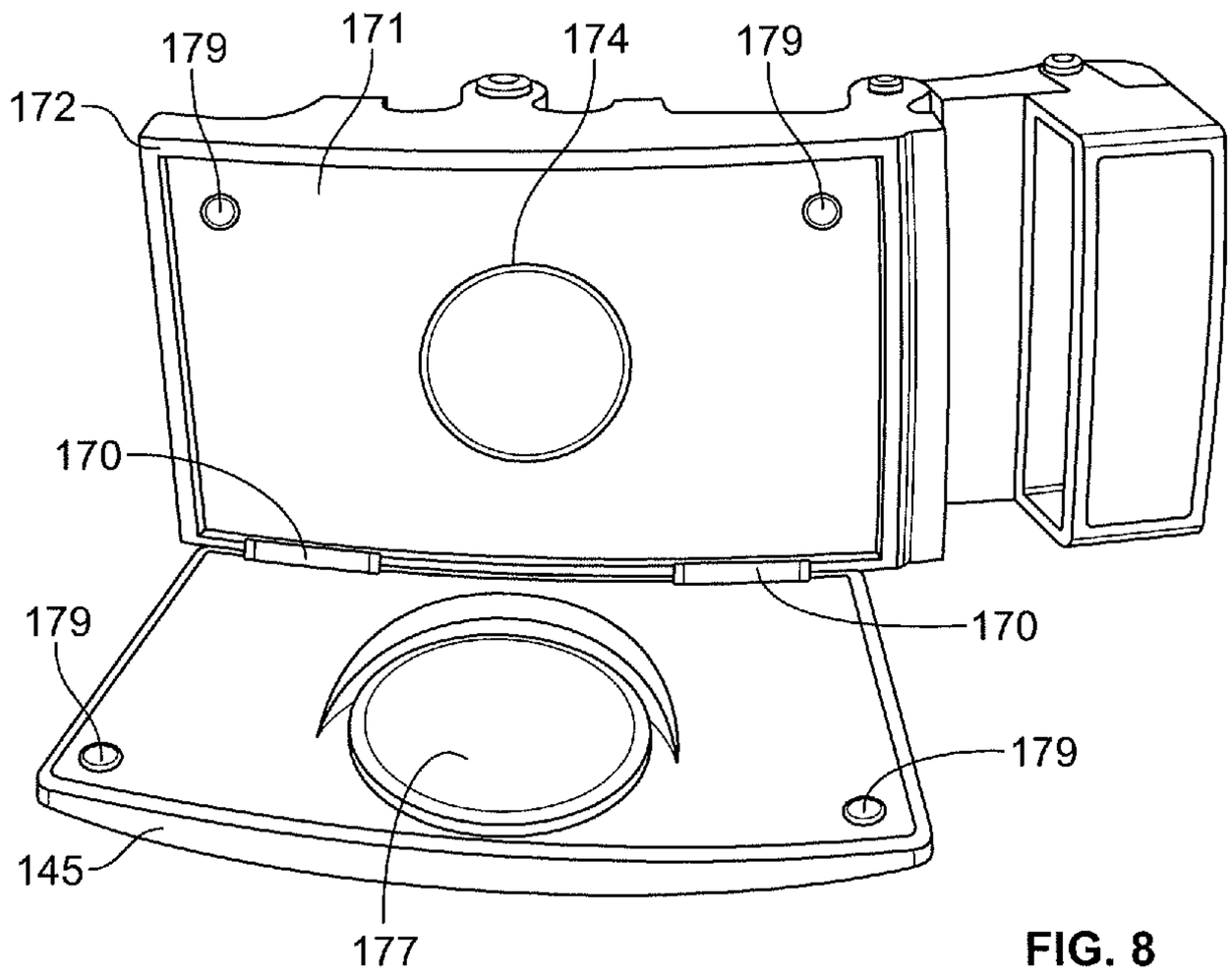


FIG. 8

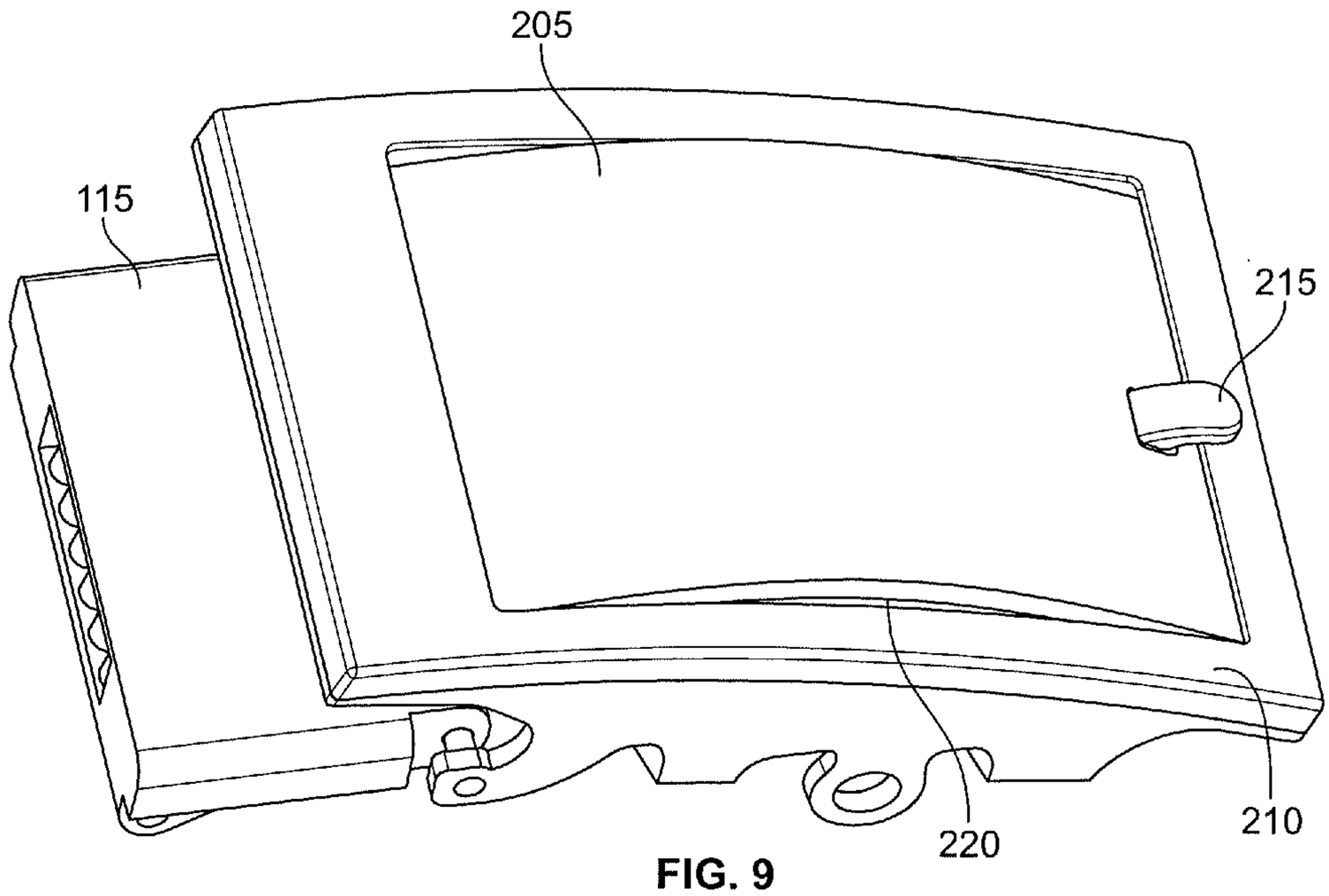


FIG. 9

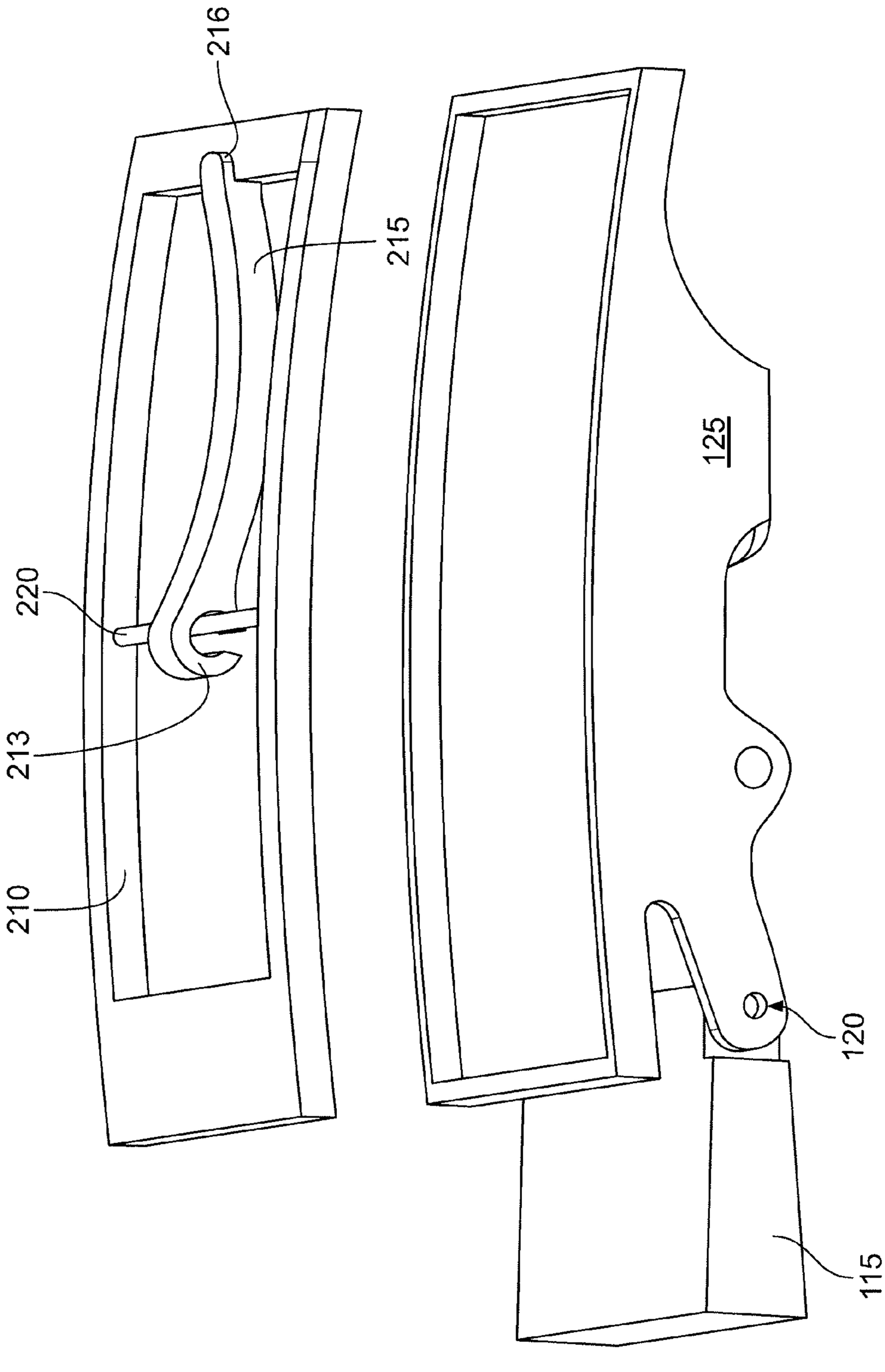


FIG. 10

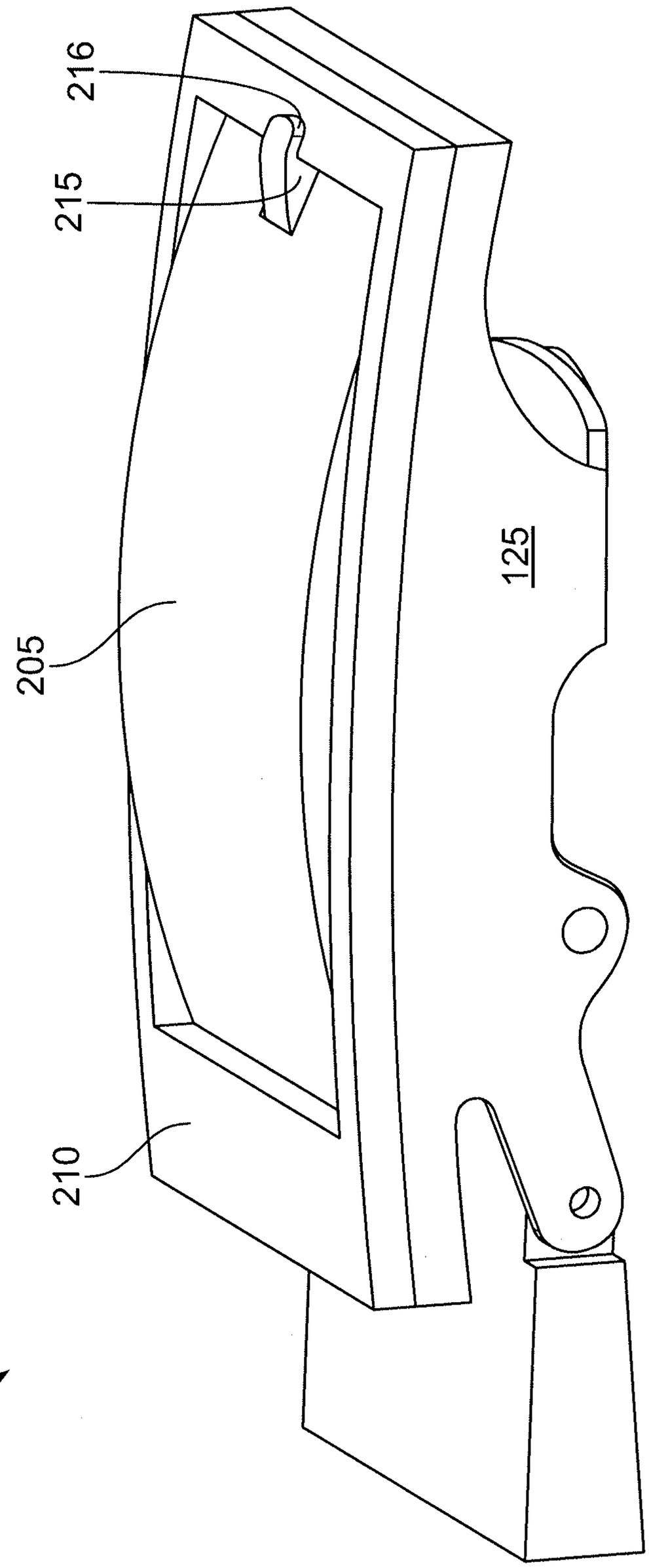


FIG. 11

BELT ADJUSTMENT SYSTEM

REFERENCE TO PRIORITY DOCUMENT

This application claims the benefit of priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. Nos. 61/374,184, filed Aug. 16, 2010, and 61/410,759, filed Nov. 5, 2010. Priority of the filing dates of Aug. 16, 2010 and Nov. 5, 2010, are hereby claimed, and the disclosures of the provisional patent applications are hereby fully incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND

Conventional belt adjustment systems are limited in their ability to conform to a particular user's waist size. Belt adjustment systems conventionally secure a belt about a user's waist by relying on a series of equidistantly-spaced holes punched through an end of a belt. A hook of a belt buckle can be inserted through a hole to capture the end of the belt to secure the belt in a loop of a particular size. The spacing between each of the holes as well as the overall number of holes can vary for adjustment of belt size, but is generally limited by the minimal material that must remain between the holes. Conventional belt adjustment systems are limited to setting the size of the belt loop to discrete sizes based upon the spacing of the holes in the belt. If a user desires to set the belt to a loop size that is positioned between the holes in the belt, the user has to manually create an additional hole in the belt, which can be difficult and unattractive if not performed well. Alternately, the user must use the next smaller or next larger belt loop size relative to the desired size, which can be uncomfortable for the user.

Other belt adjustment systems are known that increase the flexibility of adjustment to a variety of waist sizes, but these adjustment systems are not typically fashionable or aesthetically pleasing.

SUMMARY

There is a need for a belt adjustment system that permits a continuum of belt loop sizes or a larger selection of belt loop sizes. Disclosed herein are clothing accessories, particularly belt adjustment systems for wearing around a user's waist.

In one aspect, disclosed is a belt system including an elongate belt member having a first end, a second end and a series of teeth positioned on an inner surface near the second end and a fixation member. The fixation member includes a first adjustment element having a channel configured to reversibly couple with the first end of the belt member; and a rotating plate forming a surface of the channel and having a plurality of teeth configured to engage the first end of the belt member. The fixation member also includes a second adjustment element coupled to the first adjustment element. The second adjustment element includes a channel extending between an outer portion coupled to an inner span having a magnetic element, the channel configured to receive the second end of the belt member; and a belt engagement mechanism having a pivoting pin element coupled to a plate element having a pawl at a first end and a tab at a second, opposite end. The plate element includes a first position in which the tab is attracted towards the magnetic element and the pawl projects into the channel. The plate element includes a second position in which the tab is urged away from the magnetic element and the pawl rotates away from the channel.

The pin element can further include an actuation button coupled to a first end. Actuating the actuation button can pivot the plate element toward the second position. The elongate belt member can include a series of printed markings on the inner surface near the first end. The series of printed markings can correspond to a plurality of clothing waist sizes. The belt member can be customizable by cutting the first end to size according to a printed marking. The outer portion of the second adjustment element can further include a front panel. The front panel can be coupled to the outer portion by a hinge. The front panel can be configured to rotate away from the outer portion around an axis of the hinge. The hinge can be positioned on a downward-facing side of the second adjustment element and the front panel rotates in a top-down direction. The front panel can be configured to store a removable article. The removable article can be a golf ball marker removably coupled to the front panel by a magnet. The front panel can include a belt insert held within a frame and covering a hook. The belt insert can be formed of a material that matches a material of the belt member. The belt insert can include a notch in a perimeter region through which a portion of the hook is visible. The belt insert and portion of the hook can provide the belt system with an appearance of a conventional belt threaded through a belt buckle.

Other features and advantages should be apparent from the following description of various embodiments, which illustrate, by way of example, the principles of the claimed subject matter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other aspects will now be described in detail with reference to the following drawings.

FIG. **1** illustrates a schematic view of an embodiment of a belt system;

FIG. **2** illustrates a schematic view of an embodiment of a belt member;

FIG. **3** illustrates a perspective view of an embodiment of a fixation member for a belt system;

FIG. **4** illustrates another perspective view of the fixation member of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **5** illustrates another perspective view of the fixation member of FIG. **3**;

FIGS. **6**A and **6**B illustrate side and top views, respectively, of an embodiment of a plate element;

FIG. **7** illustrates a front view of an embodiment of a fixation member for a belt system in an open configuration with a golf ball marker partially inserted;

FIG. **8** illustrates a front view of the fixation member of FIG. **7** and golf ball marker;

FIG. **9** illustrates a front view of another embodiment of a fixation member for a belt system;

FIG. **10** illustrates a side exploded view of the fixation member of FIG. **9**; and

FIG. **11** illustrates a side view of the fixation member of FIG. **9**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Before the present subject matter is further described, it is to be understood that this subject matter described herein is not limited to particular embodiments described, as such may of course vary. It is also to be understood that the terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only, and is not intended to be limiting. Unless defined otherwise, all technical terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one skilled in the art to which this subject matter belongs.

FIG. **1** illustrates a schematic view of an embodiment of a belt system **100** that may be worn with a pair of pants, shorts, trousers, skirts or other articles of clothing. The system **100** can also be used with other items such as watch straps, purse straps or animal collars or other articles that may include a buckle system that is adjusted for size or where a number of size variations would be desirable. The figures include exemplary numerical dimensions. It should be appreciated that the dimensions are for example only and are not intended to be limiting. The belt buckle system can be configured with dimensions outside of the ranges and values shown.

The belt system **100** can include an elongate belt member **105** and a fixation member **110** having a first adjustment element **115** coupled via a hinge element **120** to a second adjustment element **125**. The fixation member **110** is configured to reversibly couple with the belt member **105**. A first end **101** of the belt member **105** can couple with the first adjustment element **115** of the fixation member **110** and an opposite, second end **102** of the belt member **105** can couple with the second adjustment element **125**, as will be described in more detail below.

The belt member **105** can include an elongate strip of flexible material or materials appropriate for wearing around a user's waist. The belt member **105** can be formed of a variety of materials including leather, fabric, plastic or any other material as is known in the art. As shown in FIG. **2**, the inner surface **104** of the belt member **105** can include markings **107** near the first end **101** such that the belt member **105** can be adjusted in length, such as by cutting to achieve a predetermined belt size or waist size. For example, the markings **107** can include printed or stamped graduations that can include a numerical indication of the size of the belt if cut at a particular marker. The markings **107** provide guidance for cutting the belt member **105** to customize the length of the belt member **105** to a user's pant size or waist measurement. The sizing indicated by the markings **107** can vary from at least about 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40 or larger pant size. It should be appreciated that any number of various lengths can be indicated by the markings **107**, including fraction sizes, men's sizes, women's sizes, boy's sizes, girl's sizes as well as European sizes, U.S. sizes, etc. The user can easily cut to size the belt member **105** to an appropriate size without having to use a separate measuring device. The belt member **105** customization provides the belt system **100** with a one-size-fits-all convenience and an advantage in terms of manufacturing and distribution.

Still with respect to FIG. **2**, the inner surface **104** of the belt member **105** can have a series of notches or teeth **109** at the second end **102**. The teeth **109** can have a ramped portion facing the second end **102** of belt member **105** and a stepped portion perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the belt member **105**. The teeth **109** can be configured to engage with the second adjustment element **125**, as will be described in more detail below, to provide various levels of adjustment of the position of the belt member **105** relative to the second adjustment element **125** that permits a continuum or substantial continuum of loop sizes independent of pre-punched, equidistantly-spaced holes of conventional belts. The teeth **109** can be at least about 8 cm to about 12 cm from the end **102**. In some embodiments, the teeth **109** can be positioned at least about 9 cm to about 10 cm from the end **102**. Similarly, the spacing and number of teeth **109** in the series can vary as well as the length of the belt member **105** over which the teeth **109** extend. In some embodiments, the spacing of the teeth **109** is at least about ¼" apart.

FIGS. **3**, **4** and **5** illustrate an embodiment of a fixation member **110**. As mentioned above, the fixation member **110** can have a first adjustment element **115** and a second adjustment element **125**. The first adjustment element **115** can couple to the second adjustment element **125** by a hinge element **120** such that elements **115**, **125** can rotate freely relative to one another for a more conforming fit around a portion of a user's waist. As will be discussed in more detail below, the first adjustment element **115** can couple with the first end **101** of the belt member **105** and the second adjustment element **125** can couple with the second end **102** of the belt member **105**.

As best shown in FIGS. **3** and **5**, the first adjustment element **115** can include a channel **130** that is configured to receive the first end **101** of the belt member **105**. The channel **130** can be generally rectangular in shape and formed by two sidewalls **132**, an outer wall **133** and an inner wall **131**. The inner wall **131** of the channel **130** can include a plate member **135** configured to rotate around hinge element **138** from a closed configuration to an open configuration. In the closed configuration, the outer surface of the plate member **135** can be flush with inner wall **131**. In the open configuration, the plate member **135** can rotate around hinge element **138** to extend away from the longitudinal axis of the fixation member **110**. The plate member **135** can include teeth **137** positioned on an inner surface of the plate member **135** at an end nearest the hinge element **138**. When the plate member **135** is in the closed configuration, the teeth **137** can extend into the interior volume of channel **130**. The teeth **137** can capture a belt member **105** inserted through the opening and positioned within the channel **130**. The teeth **137** upon rotation around the hinge element **138** to the closed configuration can dig into the belt member **105** positioned within the channel **130** and press the belt member **105** against the outer wall **133** of the channel **130**. The first adjustment element **115** can also include a second channel **140** positioned above the first channel **130**. The second channel **140** can be aligned with a channel **160** extending through the second adjustment element **125** along the longitudinal axis of the fixation member **110** and is configured to receive the second end **102** of the belt member **105** exiting the second adjustment element **125**.

Again with respect to FIGS. **3**, **4** and **5**, the channel **160** of the second adjustment element **125** can be formed by a front panel **145** and one or more inner spans **155** extending across the channel **160**. The inner spans **155** can be coupled at each end to a side portion of the front panel **145** and form an inner surface for the second adjustment element **125**. When worn, the front panel **145** is positioned away from a user's waist and the inner spans **155** are positioned closest to a user's waist. It should be appreciated that although the inner spans **155** are shown in the figures as being a plurality of spans **155**, that the inner surface of the second adjustment element **125** can also be formed by a single, continuous inner span **155** coupled at either end to the front panel and surrounding the channel **160**. The second adjustment element **125** can include an opening configured to receive the second end **102** of the belt member **105** such that the belt member **105** can extend through the channel **160** and into channel **140** of the first adjustment element **115**.

The second adjustment element **125** can include a belt engagement assembly for adjusting and capturing a position of the belt member **105** positioned within the channel **160**. The belt engagement assembly can include a pin element **157** coupled to a plate element **159**. The pin element **157** can extend through a pair of apertures **153** located in a side region of the inner span **155**. As best shown in FIGS. **6**A and **6**B, the plate element **159** can include a generally planar member **162** having a pawl **161** at a first end and a tab **163** at an opposite end. The pawl **161** can extend away from the plane of the plate

element **159** in a first direction and tab **163** can extend away from the plane of the plate element **159** in a second, opposite direction as pawl **161**. It should be appreciated that the tab **163** also can be generally aligned with the plane of the plate element **159**. The plate element **159** can include a pair of apertures **164** in the lateral regions of the planar member **162**. Apertures **164** can align with apertures **153** such that the pin element **157** extends through apertures **164** of the plate element **159** and apertures **153** of the span **155** to couple the plate element **159** to the second adjustment member.

The plate element **159** can toggle between a first, closed position and a second, open position. When the plate element **159** is coupled to the pin element **157**, the plate element **159** spans across the channel **160** and tab **163** aligns with a region of the inner span **155**. In some embodiments, the region of the inner span **155** can be magnetized such that the tab **163** is attracted to the region and biases the plate element **159** into the closed position in which the pawl **161** extends into channel **160** and approaches the front panel **145**. Generally, the pawl **161** avoids contact with the front panel **145** in order for the belt member **105** to more easily slide past the pawl **161** as the user inserts the second end **102** of the belt member **105** through the second adjustment element **125**. In some embodiments, a magnet **169** can be coupled to the region of the inner span **155**. The magnet **169** can be held within an outer covering configured to couple the magnet **169** to the inner span **155**. The inner span **155** can include a slot **151** or other feature through which at least a portion of the magnet **169** can be available through the span **155** from within the channel **160**.

When the plate element **159** is in the closed position, the pawl **161** can engage with teeth **109** of the belt member **105**. As mentioned above, the teeth **109** can have a ramped portion facing the second end **102** of belt member **105** and a stepped portion perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the belt member **105**. As the belt member **105** inserts through the channel **160** in a first, tightening direction away from the second end **102**, the pawl **161** can slide past the ramped portion of the teeth **109** with little to no resistance. The belt member **105** can be prevented from moving in an opposite, loosening direction towards the second end **102** due to the pawl **161** engaging and abutting against the stepped portion of the teeth **109**. Engagement between the teeth **109** of the belt member **105** and the pawl **161** of the second adjustment element **125** provide for more fine adjustment in tightness and looseness of the belt system **100** around a user's waist.

The plate element **159** can be toggled to the open position in which the pawl **161** is pulled out of engagement with teeth **109** of the belt member **105**. The pin element **157** can be coupled to an actuation button **167** at one end. Pressure applied by a user against the actuation button **167** can rotate the pin element **157** and the attached plate element **159** around the longitudinal axis of the pin element **157**. As the pin element **157** and the plate element **159** pivot, tab **163** is drawn away from magnet **169** of the inner span **155** and pawl **161** rotates away from front panel **145** and approaches a plane that is parallel to the plane of the front panel **145** and the longitudinal axis of the channel **160**. The pawl **161** is removed from the channel **160** away from engagement with teeth **109** such that the belt member **105** can be pulled in either direction through the second adjustment element **125**. Releasing the actuation button **167** allows the tab **163** to be attracted back towards the magnet **169**. The plate element **159** pivots back around the longitudinal axis of the pin element **157** in an opposite direction until tab **163** approaches (or contacts through slot **151**) magnet **169** of the inner span **155**. Pawl **161** approaches the front panel **145** and once again extends into channel **160** such that it can engage with teeth **109** of the belt member **105**.

Now with respect to FIGS. **7** and **8**, the front panel **145** can be coupled to the second adjustment element **125** by one or more hinges **170**. The hinges **170** can be positioned on a downward-facing side of the second adjustment element **125** such that when a user is wearing the belt system **100** the front panel **145** opens in a top-down direction. It should be appreciated that the hinges **170** can be positioned in other locations such as an upward-facing side or a side portion of the second adjustment element **125** such that the front panel **145** can swing open from a left-right direction or right-left direction. The front panel **145** can rotate about the hinges **170** to reveal an inner mating surface **171**. The front panel **145** can include a grip feature to aid in opening the front panel **145** away from the inner mating surface **171**. Alternatively, one or more corners **172** of the mating surface **171** can be rounded off or tapered such that a user can obtain a grip on the front panel **145** relative to the inner mating surface **171**, such as by inserting a portion of a fingernail, in order to swing the front panel **145** away from the mating surface **171**. The mating surface **171** can have one or more closure magnets **179** that aid in maintaining the front panel **145** in a closed position against the mating surface **171**. The inner surface of the front panel **145** can also include one or more closure magnets **179** aligned with the closure magnets **179** of the mating surface **171**.

The hinging front panel **145** can be used to store or conceal one or more small articles **177** within the second adjustment element **125**, including but not limited to, golf ball markers, currency, business cards, keys, and other personal items. The inner surface of the front panel **145** can include a depression **173** aligned with a corresponding depression **174** in the mating surface **171**. The depressions **173**, **174** can be configured to accept and hold the article **177** within a space between the depressions **173**, **174** and within the second adjustment element **125**. In some embodiments, the article **177** is a golf ball marker as shown in FIGS. **7** and **8**. The golf ball marker can be a generally round and flat metallic element that can slide into depression **173** of the front panel **145**. The depression **173** of the front panel **145** can be magnetized or include a magnet **175** such that the article **177** is attracted to and maintained within the depression **173** even when the front panel **145** is swung into the open position.

The belt systems **100** described herein can include a belt façade **200**. The belt system **100** incorporating the belt façade **200** can provide the convenience and fine adjustment fit of a ratcheting belt while maintaining the aesthetic of a traditional belt design. As shown in FIGS. **9**, **10**, and **11**, the belt façade **200** can be coupled to an outer surface of the second adjustment element **125**. The belt façade **200** can include a belt insert **205** and a frame **210**. The belt insert **205** can be a portion of material matched in style to the belt member **105** to which the second adjustment element **125** is coupled. For example, the belt insert **205** can be leather, fabric, plastic or any other suitable material of the belt member **105**. The frame **210** can surround the belt insert **205** at its perimeter sandwiching the belt insert **205** between the outer surface of the second adjustment element **125** and an inner surface of the frame **210**. The frame **210** can include a cross pin **220** spanning between the sides of the frame **210** near a central region of the frame **210**. The cross pin **220** can be configured to couple with a hook **215**. The hook **215** can include an aperture **213** at one end through which the cross pin **220** can be inserted. The hook **215** can also include a flange **216** at an opposite end that can be fixed to an outer portion of the frame

210. The belt insert **205** can overlay the cross pin **220** and a majority of the hook **215** such that the cross pin **220** and hook **215** are generally hidden from view. One side of the belt insert **205** can include a notch that corresponds in shape to a portion of the hook **215** near the flange **216** such that the flange **216** atop the frame **210** is visible and resembles a hook inserted through a hole of a conventional belt.

As will be apparent to those of skill in the art upon reading this disclosure, each of the individual embodiments described and illustrated herein has discrete components and features which may be readily separated from or combined with the features of any of the other several embodiments without departing from the scope of the subject matter described herein. Any recited method can be carried out in the order of events recited or in any other order which is logically possible.

While this specification contains many specifics, these should not be construed as limitations on the scope of an invention that is claimed or of what may be claimed, but rather as descriptions of features specific to particular embodiments. Certain features that are described in this specification in the context of separate embodiments can also be implemented in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features that are described in the context of a single embodiment can also be implemented in multiple embodiments separately or in any suitable sub-combination. Moreover, although features may be described above as acting in certain combinations and even initially claimed as such, one or more features from a claimed combination can in some cases be excised from the combination, and the claimed combination may be directed to a sub-combination or a variation of a sub-combination. Similarly, while operations are depicted in the drawings in a particular order, this should not be understood as requiring that such operations be performed in the particular order shown or in sequential order, or that all illustrated operations be performed, to achieve desirable results. Only a few examples and implementations are disclosed. Variations, modifications and enhancements to the described examples and implementations and other implementations may be made based on what is disclosed.

Although embodiments of various methods and devices are described herein in detail with reference to certain versions, it should be appreciated that other versions, embodiments, methods of use, and combinations thereof are also possible. Therefore the spirit and scope of the appended claims should not be limited to the description of the embodiments contained herein

What is claimed is:

1. A belt system, comprising:

an elongate belt member including a first end, a second end and a series of teeth positioned on an inner surface near the second end; and

a fixation member comprising

a first adjustment element, including

a first channel configured to reversibly couple with the first end of the belt member;

a second channel adjacent the first channel and spaced from the first channel by a wall; and

a rotating plate forming a surface of the first channel and comprising a plurality of teeth configured to engage the first end of the belt member; and

a second adjustment element coupled to the first adjustment element, the second adjustment element including:

a third channel extending between an outer portion coupled to an inner span having a magnetic element, the third channel configured to receive the second end of the belt member, wherein the outer portion of the second adjustment element further comprises a front panel, wherein the front panel com irises a belt insert held within a frame, and wherein the belt insert is formed of a material that matches a material of the belt member; and

a belt engagement mechanism including a pivoting pin element coupled to a plate element having a pawl at a first end and a tab at a second, opposite end, wherein the plate element comprises a first position in which the tab is attracted towards the magnetic element and the pawl projects into the third channel, and wherein the plate element comprises a second position in which the tab is urged away from the magnetic element and the pawl rotates away from the third channel;

wherein the elongate belt member comprises a series of printed markings on the inner surface of the belt near the first end, wherein each printed marking corresponds to a clothing waist size, and

wherein each printed marking identifies a location where the belt member should be cut to a predetermined waist size corresponding to a waist size identifier on the printed markings.

2. The belt system of claim **1**, wherein the pin element further comprises an actuation button coupled to a first end.

3. The belt system of claim **2**, wherein actuating the actuation button pivots the plate element toward the second position.

4. The belt system of claim **1**, wherein the front panel is coupled to the outer portion by a hinge.

5. The belt system of claim **4**, wherein the front panel is configured to rotate away from the outer portion around an axis of the hinge.

6. The belt system of claim **4**, wherein the hinge is positioned on a downward-facing side of the second adjustment element and the front panel rotates in a top-down direction.

7. The belt system of claim **4**, wherein the front panel is configured to store a removable article.

8. The belt system of claim **7**, wherein the removable article is a golf ball marker removably coupled to the front panel by a magnet.

9. The belt system of claim **1**, wherein the belt insert includes a notch in a perimeter region through which a portion of the hook is visible.

10. The belt system of claim **9**, wherein the belt insert and portion of the hook provides the belt system with an appearance of a conventional belt threaded through a belt buckle.

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